

Holocaust Oral History Project of San Francisco, California. Today, we're talking with Roger Boas. Assisting in the interview today are Richard Kirschman, Doris Ober, Helga Tannenbaum. Good morning, Mr. Boas.

Good morning.

Let's start in a chronological way of telling where you were born and the date of your birth and also your name and the spelling of your name if you would.

My full name is John Roger Boas, B-O-A-S, born in San Francisco, California, August 21, 1921.

And did you grow up in San Francisco?

I grew up in San Francisco. Went to Grant School, Galileo High School, and then went to Stanford.

And as a young man, I believe you told me you're Jewish.

Correct.

Both parents? And were you actively Jewish? Were you observant family?

No. We were actively a nonobservant family, I'm sorry to say. My paternal great-grandmother had been a Christian Science practitioner in Texas. And so my grandmother, mother, practiced it. My father took it up, so I was raised as a Jewish Christian scientist.

However, my mother was very political and had a very strong feeling about what was happening in Germany and in Europe. And we were well aware that we were Jewish and all our friends, all my friends, by and large, were Jewish. And in those early days in San Francisco, there was a pretty strong line of demarcation in society between Jew and non-Jew, and we were on the Jewish side.

So you were Jewish in society's eyes, but you didn't really-- weren't really actively practicing?

Didn't go to temple and didn't follow the religious services, correct. I'm a member of Temple Emanuel now, but that's many years later.

I see. As a young man and you say you were certainly alert to what was happening to Jews in Europe at that time.

Well, my mother had been very much aware of it. And she and her mother, my grandmother, and I went to Europe in 1935 for sort of a grand tour. And we went to Austria, and I saw the Heimwehr, which was really a sort of a proto-Nazi group parading around. Went to Poland and to the ghetto there and saw what it was like. And then we went to the Soviet Union, which was really preparing for war, and deliberately didn't go to Germany because of the Jewish situation.

So even in high school, I was probably a little more knowledgeable than my contemporaries. And then I became a debater both at high school and at Stanford, and we debated such things as should we support Great Britain and what should be our relationship with Germany, et cetera, et cetera.

So and I was a very anti-America firster. So I had a better feeling, I think, about what was at stake and read the writings, the early writings, of Heinz [? Pohl, ?] Shierer and the others, but I had no idea, for example, about the Einsatzgruppen or what was really happening. I didn't know it until I saw these places.

When did you enter Stanford?

I went in the fall of '38.

And your main course of study was?

Political science. And we had a couple of German students there as I recall, exchange. I remember when the pocket battleship Deutschland came here and how the Jewish community felt about it. I went down and looked at it, scared the hell out of me. But I really didn't get a picture, I don't think, of-- I didn't get a full picture until after the war.

I ended up in an Armored Div-- I was an artilleryman at Stanford in the ROTC and was commissioned and ordered to active duty the day after I graduated and was then sent eventually to an artillery training school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and from there, after a little shuffling around to an Armored Division that I stayed in for the rest of my army career. It was a division from New York, heavily Jewish, among the enlisted personnel from the Bronx and Brooklyn. I think I was the only Jew in the officer side in our battalion.

I was in an armored artillery battalion. It turned into a sort of an elite division. It became the spearhead of Patton's Third Army, so it was always in the vanguard. He regarded it as just super great.

What was it?

Pardon me?

Which division?

Was the Fourth Armored Division.

Who said?

I beg your pardon? And the Jewish enlisted men, some of them seemed to have a pretty good sense of what was going on in Europe. And I was reasonably well read, but I was caught by surprise after the war at the extent of what had been taking place. I had no idea about the extermination. And it wasn't until we hit this first camp that I had a real graphic representation of what it was like. And I was very, very angry.

And I always felt, for me, it was a good war. I knew that the Germans were after the Jews. I figured if they won, beat England, they'd be after the United States, and I'd be next, and that all risks were worth taking. So I felt, for me, that it was a very positive construction sort of an activity, quite different from the way they felt in Vietnam, for example, or even the way they felt in the Pacific. For me, I figured I'm fighting for myself and my family.

You did feel that?

Absolutely.

If they had won, they would come over, and the American Jews would be--

Absolutely.

--at risk?

Uh-huh.

Did you have-- your family have your relatives in the war zone in Europe at the time?

Yes, they did. Good question. And several got out from Europe and came to the United States and were helped by my mother and father. And furthermore, there were a number of refugees, mostly, as I recall, professionals, physicians, especially, that hit San Francisco prior to our entering the war, and we met them. And I think my parents were pretty decent about trying to help.

But I remember one very Aryan-looking sort of second cousin coming to San Francisco, a girl, very nice, describing how she'd been in a restaurant and how one of-- in Germany-- and how one of the Goering's aides had invited her to dance because he didn't recognize her looks, and she wasn't wearing any star. I guess they weren't required. So these folks got out in good time.

Which countries were they from, if you know?

They were living in Germany. My mother's father, my mother's grandmother was born in Texas. My mother was born in Cincinnati, and her father was born in the Harz mountain area of Germany and came to Cincinnati as a young man, Jewish, got in the whiskey business. And a little company he worked in became the Schenley Whiskey Company. He died very young. He used to go back to Baden-Baden every year to have diabetes worked on.

So on my mother's side, it was German. My father's father came from right out in the Danzig Free State, right outside of that. And I think he was-- you could classify him as Polish or German. I would say more Polish than German.

I never knew him. He died before I was born. He used Yiddish expressions a lot. He came to San Francisco as a youngster in 1855, just five years too late to be classified as a pioneer, and he went up to the Klondike.

And I think was sort of like a peddler up there but made a lot of money. Came down here, established a small bank on Montgomery Street, and, in effect, ran a lottery. And his clients were either Jews or Chinese. And I have his books, his financial records. And he had a lot of kids, of whom one was my father, who was born in San Francisco in 1876.

Did the fact that you had family in Europe and knew something about the refugees who have come here affect you as you went with your army unit over to Europe?

I chose to go into combat. I had, in my senior year, graduated from the business school at Stanford because the business school was denuded, and so they let the undergraduate seniors go in. And, as a consequence, I was offered a commission in either the Finance Corps or the Quartermaster Corps, which my mother wanted me to take. And my father said, you ought to do what you think is right. And I figured I ought to fight, so I went into the regular field artillery.

But many of my Jewish friends, many, many of them chose noncombatant roles, and I still see a lot of them who are living. But they worked at Fort Mason in the Quartermaster Corps and so forth. And I resented that very much. And I, in those days being young and immature, related it to the fact that maybe there was some sort of Jewish streak of noncombatancy, and I felt very badly about that.

And it's kind of a long way to answer your question, but I remember we were fighting, and we got up in the Saar area, and we got a short break. And I was given a leave, and I flew back to Nasse in a little Piper Club observation plane with a pilot who was a good friend of mine. And we had two days in Nasse, and we went to a restaurant there. And we ran into two chaps from San Francisco, both of whom I had known in grammar school, high school, and college.

One of them, the son of a former rabbi, and he was carrying a pistol and this and that, and he hadn't been within 10 miles of a German. And I was very resentful of that. It took me a while to get over that. So I really didn't know who the heck I was in that war other than I knew I was Jewish, and I knew that the Germans-- we called them Krauts-- were after us.

Did you feel that, as a Jew, you had a special obligation to be in combat, as it were, instead of in the Quartermasters?

I did.

And you said you resented those of your comrades who didn't--

Who didn't do it. And it's something that still bothers me. And I, in recent years, have had some psychiatric help, and it's interesting. I know lots of fellows now about my age-- I'm a little older-- who've made vast fortunes and never fought a

day in their life, and it bothers the hell out of me. I figure they haven't put as much in as the rest of us slobs who fought.

Perhaps later as you tell your story, when you come back, you may have some further observations on it.

I think I've given you about all I have.

When did your unit arrive in Europe? And pick us up there, where you were and then what the action was, the basic scene when your unit got in there.

First of all, I joined the unit towards the end of '42. They were in the Mojave Desert. Colder than blazes down there. And we went from the desert after training there for a while to Texas. And then we went from Texas to England.

Other units had got to Europe first. And there used to be a saying, join the Fourth Armored Division and save a WAC for combat. That was the theory. We were never going to get to see any action.

And we trained in England on the Salisbury plain area. I was actually at a theater in London with a young WREN friend when they stopped the play. That was a B.B. Daniel, Ben Lyon play. And they stopped the play, and they said the next voice would be the King of England. And he announced over the radio that the Allies had invaded.

And a week later, my outfit was alerted and sent down to the Channel, and we crossed over and landed in Normandy. And there was no problem except that as we got off these landing ship tanks, we saw just miles of wounded on stretchers waiting to go back, which was scary for us. We'd not been in combat.

Then we sat around in Normandy where our troops were given Calvados, which is a very strong apple drink and couldn't handle it. We had disciplinary problems, all sorts of stuff. All we did was run around. We were ordered to run around in circles to sort of sober up.

And then all of a sudden, we were told there was going to be a breakthrough, and we were going to get going. And we started out, and I should say that in Normandy, the only thing we did was go down and observe. And at that time, I was the battalion adjutant, was not sent out as an observer. But our observers went into those hedgerows and got badly shot up, almost immediately. One killed and one captured.

And then about a week later, we were on our way. And we went into this town of Avranches, which was just smoking from an air bombardment, our air bombardment, and we turned the corner. It was just rubble in the town.

And there was a Jeep and standing on the Jeep saluting us as we went by, looking like a million bucks, was General Patton. So that was very, very uplifting for us. I mean, everybody in my unit just thought he was fabulous.

We'd met him in England. He had come to meet all the officers of my division, and we all were ordered to a theater to meet him. And he'd gone to West Point with our division commander who introduced him.

And the West Pointer was a very sort of distinguished, courtly guy, a major general. And he introduced Patton who looked marvelous. And they said, be seated, gentlemen. He said, be seated, gentlemen, in this high, squeaky voice.

And then for an hour, he harangued us with total profanity, most of it just-- I mean, just unbelievable. And our battalion surgeon who was Jewish, Doc Horowitz, was standing next to me, a very small man. He kept saying, he's a maniac, the guy's a maniac. So it was in, I think about this is getting close to mid-June or end of June that we broke through, and then we were in combat the rest of the time.

Had you, as a young officer, impressionable, young officer, I will say, had you heard of Patton's famous slapping incident and--

Very impressionable young officer and probably not the most mature. I got out of Stanford when I was 21, in when I was 16. Had heard of it, and we were all just horrified by this guy.

And the meeting with Patton, so-called meeting-- there were 500 of us, 500 officers in the division, I think, in this theater, English theater, that we used-- solidified our feeling. As I say, Dr. Horowitz thought the guy was totally loony. And he would use the most terrible similes of all that I would not want to use even in this oral history.

One thing he said, I had a friend. He says, I told him to keep his goddamn head down. He says, he stood up one night. He says, they machine-gunned him 32 times. He said, believe it or not, the son of a bitch is still living. This was sort of a more gentle comment that he made to us, so we were very, very spooky about the guy.

But when we went through Avranches, and saw him there, it was just the opposite. It was like a wonderful tonic and from then on, all of our dealings with General Patton were wonderful, just wonderful. And I grieved when I heard about him getting killed in a car accident at the end of war. Everyone liked him.

I was modestly hit in the bridge of my nose by a piece of shrapnel. I also had a bad case of bronchitis. And Dr. Horowitz said, do you want to go to a hospital? I said, well, whatever you think. He said, I think you should, so I got sent to an evac unit or a line at the hospital behind the lines in Luxembourg city.

And I was in a ward of mostly second lieutenants, a couple of whom had been shelled just a few days before by a sister artillery battalion of mine, not the Germans. And they were in terrible shape. And there was one young fellow across away from me who just had his leg amputated and whom I got friendly with and chatted with and who died. But at this point, he was alive.

And into the hospital came General Patton and into our room, and he was accompanied by the head doctor and the head nurse and the chaplain and an aide. And everyone was swathed in bandages except me. I had a little thing on my nose.

And he said, what's the matter with you, lieutenant? And I said, I've got bronchitis, sir. And he looked at me very angrily, and he said, what outfit are you with? I said, Fourth Armored, sir. He says, you deserve a rest, lieutenant. Hope you enjoy it here.

Then he got over to this poor guy and talked to him. And he turned to his aide, and he says to the lieutenant, he says, I'm going to award you a Silver Star. And he turned to his aide who was a full colonel, and he said, give me a Silver Star.

And this poor guy reached in his pockets, and he'd forgotten the Silver Star. And Patton cursed him out in the most unmerciful, unpleasant, vicious fashion imaginable for about 10 minutes, just a diatribe, just releasing his energy. The nurses and all couldn't believe it.

And then turned back to the lieutenant, he says, I'm going to get you that Silver Star. Is there anything else you want? And the lieutenant said, I'd like some ice cream, sir. You'll get it. And the next day, another aide or officer came in with ice cream for all of us and a Silver Star for this poor guy who died about that night.

And then another time, in Belgium where it was snowing, and it was rough combat, my Jeep was driving along and all of a sudden, another Jeep came our way with three stars on it and stopped us. And I jumped out and I said, Lieutenant Roger Boas, Ninety-Fourth Armored, reporting, sir. He said, where is Twelfth Corps headquarters, lieutenant?

Well, Twelfth Corps headquarters was just about a quarter of a mile from there, but I didn't know it. And I said, I don't know, sir. He said, thank you and drove on.

And my Jeep driver, as soon as we got back, told somebody else that Lieutenant Boas had said, Patton, I don't know. And for the rest of the war, they called me the "I don't know boy." So my experiences with him were always pretty upbeat.

At the point where you had a small piece of plaster on your nose and a case of invisible bronchitis--

Right.

--did you anticipate that he would do something like--

I thought he was going to go wild. Right. But he did not, no. Just the opposite.

Was he ever antisemitic in his speech at all?

He might well have been. No, he was never.

Was he anything else?

Yeah. He was very macho, aristocratic. I've heard subsequently that he was antisemitic, and it doesn't surprise me.

Start with where your comment began and locate it in place and time and tell which way you went.

OK.

And also, clarify your own position, which was, I believe, an artillery forward observer?

I was the battalion adjutant of the Ninety-Fourth Armored Field Artillery Battalion, which is sort of a nothing job, you might say. And I was the sort of chief administrative type in the operation. And when we got an end of the hour, our battalion commander was a very nice man and a West Point officer, somewhat inhibited by the fact that he was married to a difficult woman whose father was an army commander, General Devers, his name was. He was a four-star general.

So my battalion commander was always trying to live up to what he thought his father-in-law expected of him, which eventually killed him. Graham was his name, and I liked him very much, and he liked me. And so it was a nice relationship.

And I was good at map reading, strangely enough. And when we broke through at Avranches, we then started moving toward the Lorient peninsula. And it was very scary stuff from the time we broke through in June of 1944 until the war ended in October of-- or whatever it was, '45, June of '45.

Except for the time I went to Paris on leave for three days, I was never less than a hundred feet from the Germans. And in fact, I went over on a troop ship that had been the Grace Line, the Santa Lucia. And there were, I think, 15 of us, 15 second lieutenants in this room, all Fourth Armored Division officers. And only two of us got out alive, and I'm one of them. So I was very, very lucky in this particular room.

And I think my first big test came when it was decided to try and take out the Germans who were dug in near the U-Boats on the sea coast at Lorient, France. And Patton ordered an attack, and the Fourth Armored Division was ordered to be the spearhead of it. And the tank battalion, which was commanded by Colonel Abrams, who later commanded the army in Vietnam, was supported by an infantry battalion and an artillery battalion. We were the artillery battalion.

And I was sent out to observe the fire. And General Wood, our battalion commander, sent a message to the German ordering unconditional surrender, or we're going to just cream you, guys. And the German said he wasn't going to surrender.

So I went up in a church steeple and located what I thought were the German positions and the German batteries and sent back the coordinates and then fired on them. They found the steeple, and I got a radio order saying I should stay or get out depending on what I thought. And there was a-- the sergeant with me was a fellow named [Personal name] and I said, what do you think, Bob? And he said, I think we ought to stay, Lieutenant. I said, so do I.

So we stayed, and they were shelling the steeple. And I finally said, let's get out of here. And we got out, and the next shell just knocked the steeple to smithereens, so we were very lucky.

Two things happened from that. Both [Personal name] and I got the Bronze Star, and the Germans didn't surrender until the war was over. So we never took glory. They kept throwing stuff at them throughout the war.

I had taken French in high school, and I knew absolute smattering, pidgin French. And except for my battalion commander who taught French at West Point, I was the only one who could theoretically speak the language. So I was made the battalion translator, among other things.

And we had French Patriots attached to us, and they were called FFI people, French Forces of the Interior. And they spoke English about the way I spoke French, and the communication between us was rotten.

And I mention all this because after Avranches and before Lorient, we were ordered to take the town of Rennes, R-E-N-N-E-S. And these French Forces of the Interior said that the guns had been spiked and were no good. It was a school for German 88-millimeter, dual-purpose guns. They could fire regular artillery shells or anti-aircraft.

And it was decided to go in and attack, and so I passed all that to my battalion commander and the others. So we sent a combat command into Rennes. And they waited until we were just getting ready to move into town. We crossed a plain, and those guns were not spiked.

And they opened fire, and it raised holy hell with us. We lost lots and lots of people. And I remember that very vividly because I was always leery of those French after that. I figured they must have damn well known those guns were operative.

FFI forces are actually French Underground war fighters.

That was my understanding, yes.

I think that's what they call them.

Right.

And you lost a lot of people to the famous 88.

We did. And as battalion adjutant, among my other lovely duties was graves registration officer. And the sister-- Lieutenant Mumm, his name was, who was the adjutant of the Sixty-Sixth Armored Field Artillery got killed by those 88s.

And so I was asked to come over to his battalion and make sure that the graves registration of the guys who had gotten shot, killed in that, was properly done. So I saw the mayhem first hand. But I saw a lot of that during the war. I mean, just a lot of that.

You still are not, at this point in your job, is not yet that of a forward observer.

No, I was being used as a forward observer a lot.

Oh, so were you?

Yeah.

Would you explain what a forward observer does and where you are when you perform this observing and what you do to correct the artillery fire so that we understand what your job was?

A forward observer's job is to find an enemy position that offers some interest as a target. In other words, a horse-drawn vehicle isn't much, or even a vehicle wouldn't be much, but a column of vehicles would be an interesting target. And a machine gun, in-place machine guns or artillery batteries or tanks on the move, anything like that, considered very

rewarding targets.

My battalion had three batteries, they call them, of 105-millimeter, self-propelled howitzers and a couple of 175-millimeter howitzers. And I think, all told, we had about 18 guns, cannon, in the battalion, which is a pretty fair amount. We communicated by radio. And we had telephone also, but we use the radio primarily.

And the forward observer's job was, first of all, to keep hidden if he could; keep defoliated, to use the jargon; and to figure out where on the map the enemy target was located, then radio that position back to the gun batteries, actually, to the battalion headquarters where an operations officer would decide who was going to shoot at it; and then observe the shells because they ordinarily would come nowhere near the target. They would be short of it or over it or to the right or left. And then, we would go through what they call "adjusting the gun battery" to bring it on the target. So that was my job.

And going back to my stories of Patton. I was up in Arracourt, France, observing, and all of a sudden, I hear some voices behind me. And it is my division commander, General Wood, who was an All-American football player, and General Patton.

And the general said, orient us, Lieutenant, and he gives me a map. And what he gave me was a map of Europe, not a map of the sector we were in. And I said, I can't, sir. I'll have to show you my map. This is the whole European theater.

So I showed them where we were. He thanked me. He and Patton left.

And all of a sudden, Germans started the machine guns. And I lay down and literally felt the grass being mowed right on top of me. And it was on top of a little hill. And when I thought it was safe and it was, I peeked my head up, and I could see movement down below and so forth. I had binoculars, figured out where the coordinates were, and brought fire on them.

I forget whether it was successful. I don't know whether we hit them or not. But that's what I did.

And I had two vehicles assigned to me. One was what we call the Peep, which was a little Willis Jeep, small vehicle with a armor plate on it instead of a glass windshield and with a slit in the armor plate, all of which we were very leery about. And that is because there was a fellow in my outfit named Dent who came from Colorado and had been an All-American football player there.

And we attacked the town of Troyes, T-R-O-Y-E-S, or pronounced Troys in those days, and he said, I know I'm going to get killed, as he went out. And we all said, no, you're not dude. And he says, how do you know I'm not? And we said, you got the shield, and he had this shield on his vehicle. And he was machine-gunned and killed and, in fact, he was killed while he was broadcasting.

He was a forward observer. And he was killed while he was broadcasting radial coordinates. And his hand stuck on the mic, and we heard him scream as the bullets entered him. And so we were very leery of those vehicles afterwards.

So we also had the option of a light tank, which is a tank with a machine gun on it and a very small caliber. They call it a rifle, a cannon, not a 105. But you could go out and observe and-- the machine gun bullets couldn't hurt you. I didn't feel comfortable in a tank. I forgot that I ever used one, but in studying up for this broadcast, I went through my history books, and I see my name mentioned as having been in a tank in a fight on a town.

But usually, I was in one of those vehicles with a radio operator and a driver. And I had a very nice driver named Rubenstein, and in one of these situations, he was killed. And my wife and I were in Europe a couple of years ago. We were in Paris. And I thought I might go and visit his grave.

And so I called the embassy, and they have a graves registration officer. But he'd been buried where we were fighting up way outside of France. He was in a grave in Belgium, so I didn't get to see him.

Was there attitude that you could notice among your compatriots because you were in a unit that was heavily Jewish or at least the number of Jews in it? Was there any kind of attitude that you could notice as you went across Europe that they were-- anything they were feeling or any perceptible attitude because it was a heavily Jewish outfit?

First of all, the attitude intradivision was wonderful. The morale was very, very high. The esprit was fabulous so that those still living, enlisted and the commissioned, are friends to this day.

And I get Christmas cards every year from these folks. And whenever I go to the East Coast, I try and visit if I can. And we still feel very much at home with one another, don't bore one another, and like one another. There was no feeling about-- there was no even mild sense of antisemitism in the Fourth Armored Division.

The enlisted men were really weisenheimer type of young, New York Jews, feisty as all get out. And they had this sense of what the Germans were doing, and they hated them, just hated them. And would, I think, have committed acts that they would have regretted in later life if they'd been allowed to do so once they captured Germans. But they just hated them.

Insofar as the Gentile members of the division were concerned, I think they all thought it was a pretty good war, and they figured the Germans were no good. The bloody Krauts is the way they used to refer to them. But there was a certain amount of respect.

And the officers were a college-educated bunch, a lot of ROTC officers, by and large fairly erudite, middle class, who'd come out of business careers or were going to go into good family businesses and so forth, but surprisingly naive politically. Really didn't know much about the English political situation; French, poorly read, and not at all interested in that sort of thing. Very, very odd that they shouldn't have been more acute, but they were not. But the Jewish enlisted people were a different cup of tea entirely.

Do you have any idea why that was?

Either through their religious leaders or the periodicals they read or whatever, they were much more sophisticated politically. And I might say that among the Jewish enlisted personnel, many of whom proved to be heroes. They received battlefield commissions. And there was a Sergeant Steinberg and a Sergeant Levy and others, all of whom were promoted to join the officer group.

But I'm speaking of when we went into England and France in the early part of the combat. There was no feeling of anger, as such, about the Germans except from Dr. Horowitz and me and those Jewish enlisted people. The Jews were the ones that packed the animosity, put it that way.

Were most of these people draftees or volunteers?

The enlisted were all draftees, every last one. There were no volunteers.

As you went across Europe, clearly you saw what war amounts to-- dead people, maimed. You described some of it. You were getting an education of a very deep emotional sort for a young lieutenant at that point. Am I correct in that?

Yes.

Did you notice also the results of what German occupation of these territories had done? Did you ever notice any, what you could say would be, not necessarily atrocities, but just the effect on the civil populace of what the German occupation had been?

Yes. Starting with the English who were not occupied, but who had been embattled, my general feeling about them was they were wonderful to us as the people I met in England were wonderful, and they hated the Germans with a deadly hatred. The French, we met because after the breakthrough, we were sort of horsing around in the outskirts of Normandy and Brittany for quite a while. We were fighting, but I mean, we would be in farmhouses, and we would

meet a lot of the French people.

And I got a very odd sense about the French that still exists. I didn't like them. And many of my colleagues felt the same way for some reason or another. They hated the Germans. They didn't like the Boche, and that came across very well, but they weren't pleasant.

Now those FFI people were very nice. They really tried. They may not have been competent, but they were really doing their best. But the French we met bothered us, and that was a feeling that I think was pretty universal in my outfit.

The Belgians we met, on the contrary, were wonderful. We fought in Arlon, Belgium, before going into Bastogne. We're leaving Bastogne, and all the Belgians we met were nice. I would say of those who were jittery about the Germans the most, it was the French and the Czechs. Both of them really were plenty scared of them.

As a heavily Jewish unit, was there ever anything from the civil populace that you can recall that at least taking note of the fact that you have a lot of Jews in your outfit? Anything at all to show that they understood?

You know, I think one sometimes feels one can sense antisemitism. I'm not so sure how correct the sense is, really, but I felt that strongly in France then. And I didn't feel it in Czechoslovakia. And I didn't feel it in Belgium, and I didn't feel it in England. So I would say, because those are the countries I was in. Luxembourg for a short while.

God knows the antisemitism was there and is there. But when they're hungry and in trouble and here we are, an army, strong and high morale and full of beans, I don't think we're going to pick that up unless we're very clever or very good at communicating in the language, and none of us were. I wasn't, at any rate.

As you progressed along, where was in the first place where you encountered German persons?

There were some in England that had been captured in Africa. And we began to take them shortly after combat, and in my mind, they were monsters. And I remember the first group we captured were fairly-- I was fairly sympathetic to them. They looked, you know, dazed and bemused and helpless. One didn't sense a master race sort of situation.

When we would come across the Waffen-SS as we did units of them, they were very different cup of tea. They were truculent and tough. The Americans came in at the end of it, really. The Germans were going down the hill pretty fast. Still, they fought like cats, and they really fought very hard.

Where was the first place you encountered persons who had been taken prisoner by the Germans?

What I saw initially along this line were piles of either American or German dead bodies, just stacked up in uniform. And whether we had committed atrocities and gunned these Germans down or vice versa, I was never sure. As we would drive by, the rumor would be that the Germans murdered our guys, but the Germans we saw lined up had always been shot fairly honorably, so to speak.

But I saw piles of bodies, especially in Belgium and in the Saar where it was cold on the ground you couldn't bury them so easily. Common sight. Incidentally, I had a wonderful camera, the kind that folded in and out, and it was stolen from my Jeep in England, and I never replaced it. So I never did much photographing.

I think my recollection of the first time I really saw German prisoners was in Ohrdruf. And what happened there is we were going toward East Germany. We had crossed the Rhine at the town of Oppenheim. My division commander found a bridge over the damn thing, so we crossed over. And we crossed another river, and we were near East Germany.

We actually ended up the war in a town called Chemnitz. And this was in April. I mean, we went as far as we could go in that direction, that Chemnitz.

And we got to Ohrdruf where we had to stay for a couple of days, and I forget why. And there was a great big castle there. And I'd say the castle would have been built within the last 10 years, so sometime between '35 and 45. Great, big,

huge thing with a drawbridge and a moat.

And we drove-- when I say "we," a couple of officers, of which I was one, and some enlisted men with machine guns, et cetera, got on the moat, crossed the bridge with our vehicles, and drove into the castle courtyard. And I believe there were a couple of German retainers in the castle, but I'm not sure of that. And the castle was furnished in what I would call Bauhaus furniture-- blond, light woods and this and that and furnished very expensively, I would say. And we found that it belonged to the head of the IG Farben Works in the area.

And my memory is that, looking out of a living room window, we saw a concentration camp across the street. And my battalion commander, whom I once chatted with about this, remembers it from the children's window. But we could look through the window and right across the street from this darn place was a camp. So as soon as we saw the camp, we left the castle and drove over to the camp.

And I don't remember any living people. What we found were a group of inmates in the camp town square in a pile, bleeding, dead, all of them shot within the last 24 hours with a bullet in the head is my recollection. And then I remember going into one of the barracks and seeing some bodies hanging from the ceiling on hooks, dead, and lots of bodies in the barracks.

And the only other direct recollection-- we stayed in Ohrdruf for a couple of days, and we had a combat commander named Sears and either he or General Patton-- I don't remember whom -- ordered some of the leading townspeople and the burgermeister, the mayor, to come view the camp, which they did. Then the mayor killed himself either from remorse or maybe from fear that he was going to be tried anyway. So that was my first experience of prisoners of the Germans.

What were these people wearing, these bodies you saw?

They were all pretty emaciated. They were wearing striped-- looked like striped pajamas. They had little caps, some of them. Had a very bad stench about the camp, very bad.

And we hesitated about-- we looked to see if any of those people were still alive. And as far as we could tell, they were not. We hesitated actually putting our hands on the bodies, and I can't tell you why.

But I do know that that evening, I was told that one of the prisoners had been an American from the university, and they found out-- it could all be totally spurious, but we all believed it as gospel that he came from UC Berkeley and had been a teacher there. Now how the hell they found that out, whether it's so or not, and how he got to a camp like this, I don't know.

Was there any evidence, were you concerned about disease?

Well, for those of us, I don't think a disease entered our minds. But for those who saw the camp, especially the Gentile officers, this was an absolute shock. I've never seen anything like Ohrdruf before or since. Now I'm sure, as your other participants have told you, that Auschwitz and all were much worse, but I've never seen it. I've never seen anything quite like that.

And every time I read about something-- I read in the paper yesterday, Lebanon, it seems to me, has ceased to exist. The Syrians now just moved in. And I read where the Syrians executed 30 Christian Lebanese just out of hand. And when I read that, my mind went back to this Ohrdruf situation. It always seems to do that. It's just indelible.

Why we would Ohrdruf have so impressed Gentiles and more so than Jews?

Because I don't think they realized what the Germans were up to until they saw this. They figured that they were shooting at-- that we're battling over land and political hegemony, balance of power, so to speak, rather than we're battling real evil.

These people who you found there were all dead, you thought, of gunshot wounds?

Yes. Apparently, the guard-- pardon me?

What did they tell you?

The guards got out in a hurry. And they didn't know what to do with these folks, so they just murdered them.

And the ones hanging from hooks?

I have no idea what the devil was going on with them. They were in terrible shape. Naked. They were all-- they had no uniform on all of them. They were naked.

Now I've read since that they had killed around 4,000 in the last days of that camp and buried them or burned them or something. If that's so, my own duties didn't provide for me to go spend much more time in that camp, and I was busy. All I know is that it was a brutal situation. I mean, here are people who are totally helpless, and I guess--

How many bodies do you roughly--

Well, I think in the square there, the camp, my memory's always been 35 to 50, something like that. And then that barracks, I would have thought about 30 or 40.

Were any of them wearing the Jewish star?

Well, I've been wondering about that now that I'm here at the Holocaust Center. And I don't remember. I assumed they were Jews, but I'm not at all sure that that's the case.

You have no memory of anything that would give you that impression that they were Jews?

I find it very hard to go back unless it's humorous. I can remember some of the humorous things in the war very clearly. But the dreadful things, I was afraid almost constantly the entire time I was over there.

And I used to say to myself, if I can only get out of this mess, I'm going to go back to San Francisco, and I'm going to go to the Royal Theater, which is a little movie theater on Polk Street. That, to me, was security. And I wasn't sure I was going to get out of it at all. And when you're scared, I think the impressions are recorded in a different fashion.

So that my feeling about the Germans didn't when the war ended, I was set to occupation duty in and, among other things, we were the jailers for the lower-ranking generals. We had about 200 German generals, major general on down one lieutenant general who were not at that time considered war criminals. So I was feeling the war was over. No one was shooting at us. I could examine them in a nice, cool fashion.

When we were fighting, it was always so miserable. We never had the right shoes in the mud up on the Saar, and we suffered from terrible foot problems until foot packs arrived rather late. Something was happening ghastly to us every day.

They lobbed a grenade through the tank of one of my friends and cleaned everybody out, and that sort of thing would just happen continuously. We got caught up on a hill. We'd gone to see a movie of Bing Crosby called *Going My Way* at night. And the next day I was up again observing fire and I saw, that is, telling my gun battery where gun batteries were to shoot.

And we thought the German Air Force was almost finished, and all of a sudden, the sky is filled with these FWs, Focke-Wulfes. And they dive bomb us. My battalion was nicely screened, but the artillery battalion next to us was with not, and they just slaughtered them. Again, I got called in to make sure the graves registration was done right.

And so, for me, I was just running scared the whole damn war. And it wasn't until-- and when I try and go back in memory, it's very tough. And I've been back sort of trying to look twice.

Once in 1955, tried to go back to the French battlefields. Couldn't even find them. And then more recently, this year, I went back to Czechoslovakia, and the same experience. So somehow or another, I'm not the greatest in dredging it up.

Did your enlisted personnel from your unit, did many of the Bronx guys, also see what you saw in Ohrdruf?

Yes. And now you remind me, we had captured some Germans around there. And they were being guarded by our-- our battalion, the Ninety-Fourth had captured them. They were under Ninety-Fourth guard, and a couple of the guards were Jewish.

And they wanted to kill those prisoners. They had asked permission to have all those German prisoners turned over to them. And the battalion commander wouldn't do it. Lucky he didn't.

Was this because of what those men, enlisted men, had seen in Ohrdruf?

Right.

They were under the impression the dead people were Jewish also?

I think so. We were approaching the town of Bayreuth, and another fellow and I were sitting by the wayside having breakfast in front of his tank. We were on the highway leading into Bayreuth. And we were a line of tanks. My vehicle again was this Jeep with the leaded windshield.

I had gone over to have breakfast with Davis was his name, Les Davis. And we were having coffee, which we had made, and we had a little Coleman stove. And we saw some children approaching the tank in front of us and speaking German and I think saying cigarette or something like that.

And the fellows in the tank in front of us said, come on over. And these kids who, I would say, were about 10 or 11, got up to within 10 feet from the tank where these fellows were having their breakfast, too. And out from behind them they brought what they call Panzerfaust, which is like our bazookas. And they let fly with these Panzerfaust, and they slaughtered all these guys. And so then they tried to run off, and they were machine-gunned, the kids were.

And shortly after that, we drove into the town of Bayreuth feeling very, very angry as you do, you know, when you see this sort of thing. I think I would often go by a vehicle that had been hit by a shell and burned with its occupants in it, and you'd see them there, just totally burned up, just a smelly shell. And you just get so outraged, but, really, either who or why, I don't know. You know, it's just part of the game.

But we got into Bayreuth and how we got there, I don't know but we ended up in Wagner's house, which was in real Bauhaus-y sort of design. And it was filled with Polish slave women. I'd seen these slaves, both Polish and gypsy, as we'd gone along, but never long enough to really try and communicate. And here we were, two young lieutenants plus our enlisted guys, and a whole bunch of young, fairly attractive Polish women.

And they took a shine to Davis because he could play the piano. There were a lot of pianos in this house, and he started playing, and they crowded around him. And they really hated the Germans.

And I forget how they communicated, but they were telling us what it was like. And they'd been slaves there in Wagner's house for a couple of years, as I recall. They had tattoos and the whole bit. So we saw them at a very close. And I got the impression now as I think about it, we would see a lot of the enslaved peoples. But the Jews were in more isolated instances.

Did you ever see any Jew?

Well, I saw-- I came across a whole mass of Jewish women. And when I say "mass," I would say hundreds. Hundreds and hundreds. And I thought it was in Theresienstadt, but as you and I were chatting before, I may not have gotten there. And they may have been just out of Theresienstadt, and we may have come-- they were under guard, so to speak. They were there were in an enclosure, and I'm not sure where the devil it was.

They immediately recognized me as a Jew, and they all had stars on. They had shaved heads. They had the striped pajamas. They looked awful.

They were very animated. They weren't walking dead. They were very animated, very excited. They crowded around me and the GIs with me and so forth. And they said to me either Judisch or Jude, Jude, Judisch? I knew they were asking me, was I Jewish or not?

So my German was even worse than my French, meaning nonexistent, but I said ja. Jewish? Jude? And they smiled back and this and that. And they looked very badly, I thought. Just a huge number of women in these garbs all shaven, almost like animals, you know?

Had they been freed before this and simply were still there at this place?

Well, there couldn't have been much before because we were very much in combat. We were moving along. We were fighting. And all of a sudden, we came across this group. So I'm just guessing that probably it would have been in the last 24, 48, 36 hours, something like that.

They didn't appear to be starved or emaciated over a long period?

Well, they were not well. They were emaciated. But they weren't lying there. They were very excited about the presence of this unit of soldiers.

They were very animated. That's the word. They were very animated. And they felt us. They ran their hands over me, all over me just like this.

And we had all kinds of stuff, you know. Cigarettes and chocolates, and we existed on K-rations and C-rations. And I was a kind of a chocoholic, so I always that a lot of chocolate. Passed all that out, and they liked that.

They would have liked to have had us stay there. No question about it. They wanted the companionship and the friendship. And we were not able to do that.

What were they wearing?

I have always remembered them as sort of a pajama, striped, horrible-looking, damned, striped thing, the worst. The same stripe we saw in Ohrdruf.

But with the star this time?

Yup. All had stars. They were all Jewish. Every last one of those women was Jewish.

Of various ages or just all young, all old?

They were various. The ones that were touching us were I would have been 21 then. And I thought they were a little older than me, so they must have been in their mid-20s, late 20s or maybe early 30s.

Did you ever have any sense of what they were all doing there in this place?

I didn't. I figured they were concentration camp survivors.

You saw no stack of bodies or anything such as you had seen?

Correct.

No men? No men in the camp?

No. Saw no men. All women. As far as we could look or see, they were women.

Who seemed to be caring for them?

We were moving. Our division was moving. And we stopped and looked at these women and talked to these women. None of them spoke English. I remember now Richard trying to speak French to them. None of them spoke French, so they either spoke German or Polish or a language that I couldn't handle.

They would have been most willing to talk, but there was no way to communicate. We had no translator with us, and we had to get out. We had to get going. So I don't know how they were being cared for.

Would you have understood if they were speaking Yiddish?

No.

You couldn't identify what they were speaking?

Good question. You know you're asking me to go back 45 years. I seem to remember some Yiddish being spoken.

How long did you stay there with them before you had to move on?

I'd say about a half an hour, 45 minutes, maybe a little longer. It was very, very-- it almost like an electric shock to see the situation. We've been used to seeing combatants. The people we saw in Ohrdruf were men. To see these women in this situation was just extraordinary.

You saw no women at Ohrdruf.

Not that I recall.

And as soon as you left there, just seeing hundreds of women wearing shaved heads, obviously degraded in a prisoner situation, do you recall what your reaction was to that and clearly all wearing the Jewish star?

That the one thing they would like to have done with us is gone with us. I felt, gee, they wanted to get out of there very badly was my feeling. They felt very badly was my feeling.

They were very excited to see us. We absolutely represented liberation to them was my feeling then. They would have done anything.

If we had said, look, would you shine our shoes or something, they would have done it with great pleasure. Just their manner was saying, you know, welcome, we're so excited to see you. And here is a Jew, for god's sakes, a live Jew in an American army uniform. They couldn't get over it.

How did it make you feel?

Well, as you properly pointed out earlier, I was very impressionable in those days. I don't know whether I was able to put myself in their position properly or not. I'm afraid I felt, by god, I am a tough conqueror. Damn lucky to have a guy like me around, that's my guess as to how I felt. Couldn't have been farther off base, but we had that sort of arrogance, I think.

Do you have any recollection at all whether or not your military unit took any measures to care for those people after you-- as the combat people went on through?

I don't think we ever did that. We never played that role that I'm aware of until after the war was over. During the war, right from the time we hit France, they used to say a good German is a dead German. I mean, that was just repeated all the time.

And all we did was try and kill Germans. I got the Silver Star for killing Germans, literally. And that was the only lingua franca in my outfit.

And, in fact, when I came home from the war, the people that I used to know and my parents and all were just horrified at my attitude, which is, I suppose very much like some of the folks we got out of Vietnam who have not ever gotten over it. In other words, you shoot first and ask questions afterwards. That was another one we used to hear all the time.

I had a Luger. I had a P38, rather, and a carbine. Carbine assigned to me and a P38 picked up as contraband. And, like everyone else, I killed a lot of Germans. Actually saw them-- I remember the Germans [LOUD GROAN] when the bullet hit, so that was our thought. That was the whole raison d'etre.

We were very fast. The division moved very fast in those days. We had nicknames of "lightning" this and "hell on wheels" before, but it was always move fast. Abrams was considered the greatest tank commander the army produced in World War II, and he was always moving fast. And he would train his men to shoot immediately. See anything, shoot. He used to say-- the gist of what he would say is, you're not going to kill anybody if you don't fire the gun, so to speak.

And so other than getting in written instructions about not disturbing the civilian populace or not fiddling around with the women or trying to avoid alcoholism, which we would occasionally get written instruction, and as the adjutant, I had to make sure those got out to everybody. The entire philosophy was very combative, so that the thought would never have entered our mind, I don't think.

Only time I ever saw any sense of humanity ever in that Fourth Armored Division was in Brittany. We saw some Germans approaching an intersection, and we fired at them and killed them. I think about eight or nine. I was part of the group that fired at them.

They didn't see us. They were walking down the street, and we just gunned them down. They were about two blocks away from us. No one gave a damn.

The Germans apparently had a cart and a horse. And the cart and horse spooked at this, and the horse came racing down the road, a macadam road, and got pretty close. And one of our guys opened up like a damn fool with a machine gun and machine-gunned the horse. And the horse was laying there dying in the street.

And our battalion commander, Colonel Graham, came up, saw this, went out, shot the horse in the head. And then he came over, and he dressed that sergeant whose name was [? Plaz, ?] dressed him down, said, I ought to bust you, I ought to court martial you. You're just a bloody, ruthless, goddamn killer sort of stuff. As far as the Germans were concerned, that was just-- that's what we got paid for. But the horse was different. Now that was the attitude.

As a young man, a young Jew from San Francisco who wanted to be in combat specifically, were you ever inclined to, after you had seen Ohrdruf and those women, to want to-- what was your feeling for the German population that you came in contact with?

I didn't like them at all. And I remember having a difficult time with a couple of German nurses. We uncovered some sort of institution, and there were nurses in army uniform, army nurses. And we wanted to get a key, and they wouldn't give us a key.

And I remember cursing them and saying, look, Fraulein, I want the goddamn key fast. And I don't know if I said it in

French or English. And she understood and she was very angry at my talking to her in that fashion. And I didn't like them at all, hated them.

And in 1966 or '67, that's 20-some years after, I was invited by the German government to make an official visit to Germany at their expense. And I thought about it for a long time. I turned them down. And then the invitation was reissued, and I went.

And I mostly met Social Democrats, but the ones I met were very nice and some of the younger people, including my guides, didn't have no idea what was going on. Never heard of an Einsatzgruppen and so forth. So I found that there were a lot of very nice Germans indeed. And it took that trip going back there to get me to change my mind.

Were you ever tempted to do unto those Germans as you had seen they had done unto the people?

I certainly would have. I wouldn't have hesitated to have-- we killed a lot of Germans. We never, that I can recall, killed German civilians.

And we took up occupation in Germany and, again, as the adjutant of the battalion, I had to deal with the inhabitants of the town. It was a very small town, and it was on an arm's length basis. I was very leery of them. I avoided ever having a German girlfriend, didn't want that.

What town was it?

Riedenburg, which was south of Regensburg in Bavaria. And we were in Riedenburg because there was a castle there, and that's where we put the German generals. We imprisoned them. But no, I was certainly very anti-German for at least 20-some odd years after the war.

As an artilleryman, you must have realized you probably killed some civilians.

Yes. The artillery is a very hit-and-miss proposition. As I say, we shot up some of our own guys who were in that hospital in Luxembourg. So we weren't very technically correct all the time, and I'm sure we hit civilians.

That aspect of it didn't trouble you necessarily?

No. Either correctly or incorrectly, I felt the whole activity was very constructive and the right thing to do, that Germany was just a miserable, horrible entity and had to be stopped. I felt that strongly right from the word go.

As you were in Germany in an occupational capacity, did you come to have knowledge more and more knowledge, as the camps were discovered and the atrocities unveiled by other forces elsewhere? Did you come to have more knowledge of what had happened in Germany to Jews and to other persons?

The army used a point system on rotating out of the service. And because I had the Silver and Bronze Star and had been in five combats with each one of the battle star-- you know that was how they added up the points-- I had enough points to get out. And for me, I think I made a great career mistake. I should have stayed, gone to school over there, and seen more. But for some reason, I was anxious to come home.

I was very disappointed once I got home, so I realized it was an error. The long and the short of it is I was only on occupation duty for, I'd say, three or four months before I was one of the early rotated out. And, no, I didn't get any sense of those camps nor were we told about them while I was over there. The only thing I learned was what those German generals were like and what the townspeople were like. And I didn't like the townspeople.

We were in a gasthaus I think it's called, sort of a bar and lodge. And that's where the headquarters was. And the owner of the gasthaus we took it over-- and the owner didn't like us, didn't like us being there, was not a pleasant man. And the townspeople looked at us very askance and we at them.

By the time the war was over and we were on occupation duty, we didn't like the Germans, none of the people, except that sexual relationships were formed by many of both the officers and GIs. I was leery of any sort of relationship with a German. And then I came home.

And you had a 20-year period in which you were certainly not pro-German, I gather. And how has it affected how you view events in Germany now? Do you have any fears about a united Germany, which is a fact now?

Well, in those 20 years, from about '58 to well, for many years thereafter, I did a weekly television show on the public system that examined what was going on in the world and in Germany. So I was up to date, and I remember asking always our German correspondent antagonistic questions. What are the former SS up to now sort of stuff.

It wasn't until I went over there and spent a month in Germany that I came away very impressed with the fact that there were some damn nice Germans. I often wondered where they were and what they were doing from 1933 on. Some of them too young, but many of them not.

Most of them the Social Democrats from the Willy Brandt stripe. And they were very direct, very straightforward, and, I thought, very first class. And I saw a lot of them. As a guest of the German government, you could literally see anyone you want.

So I did a did a big about-face about generalizing about Germany. And I was in East Berlin recently. And the Germans I saw in Berlin and East Berlin some nice, some not so good.

I think it's an inevitable move, this reunification. And considering the shambles of the Communist countries, at least East Germany is going to be pulled out from that mess, which I think is a big plus. And I also feel that the Germans have been very, very correct over the last 40 years in their, at least, reparations policy to the Jewish families that could establish identity there.

You mean the West Germans?

The West Germans, yes. And I think von Weizsacker, the president of Germany, is just wonderful. Having said all that, like everyone else who fought them, I have concerns that they're going to get too big and too powerful and eventually may decide to flex their muscles. But no sense worrying about that.

Are your concerns because you're a person of international interests or partly because you're a Jew?

Well, I have lots of concerns these days about antisemitism, and it always seems to follow economic decline, and the economic decline in the Communist countries is going much faster than anyone thought it would. And the economic decline in the United States is starting, in my view. And I'm concerned about antisemitism, and my guess is it's wholly subjective because I'm Jewish, my family is Jewish, and I know that they're at risk.

Strangely enough, I don't put Germany in that category. That is, they have antisemites there, and they have a strong, not-too-big but strong right-wing party over there. But I think they have so many devices to stamp out antisemitism as part of their official government structure that they'll do it whereas in the Russian government, they don't have the devices. And in Pamyat and elsewhere, there's no way to stamp it out, and it's growing like weeds over there, very fast.

But I think insofar as government-supported or government-tolerated antisemitism is concerned, Germany may turn out to be a bastion of strength even though my guess is there's plenty of antisemitism in East Germany that's going to come out. But I have nothing to go on. I'm not a scholar in this area.

Where were you and when was it that the full enormity of Auschwitz and Mauthausen and the full enormity of what had occurred to basically the Jews in Poland and Europe was brought home to you? When did you finally realize? Do you recall?

I was back in the United States. And I think the two bits of information that I came across, quite separate. One was the

history of the Einsatzgruppen, and I had not been aware of them at all. And that was so particularly bad and outrageous. And it was such a strong part of Wannsee decision.

And that came out, you know, when I think about '46 or '47, and I picked that up. And I went, in those days in San Francisco, with a very intellectual group, including several refugees from Germany and Vienna who were at Berkeley, and we were all very close friends. So we would pick anything like that up very fast and talk about it.

And then the other, which came later, was the fact that pleas had been made to our State Department to step in, and to Roosevelt himself said that those pleas had been ignored. And that really has bothered me and scared me. I figure that can happen again and probably will.

Do you have a sense of why Roosevelt may or may not have been able to move or chose not to move during the war years themselves?

I think probably the same sort of a syndrome of why wasn't I and my colleagues more concerned about who was going to care for those women. In other words, we felt we had a task, and the task didn't embody that so let someone else who's got that responsibility worry about it. I think Roosevelt was one of these people who, in order to get something done, didn't scattershot. He had a couple of major goals, and he stayed with those instead of having a lot.

I don't think being a humanitarian was particularly a Roosevelt goal. His goal was to whip the Germans and the Japanese and not to allow anything to get in the way of that. And it must have appeared diversionary of effort or time or money or whatever, and he did the wrong thing.

There's a, as you well know, an ongoing controversy about how much our government knew of what was happening in Germany, particularly with respect to the camps. What's your view of how much we knew about places like Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen and Dachau and even Auschwitz and essentially the Russian sector of the world. How much did we know?

I'm afraid I can't answer that question. I was very simplistic. I always figured that Roosevelt had a damn good Jew in Henry Morgenthau out there and that Morgenthau was his neighbor and buddy and that he trusted him.

And I always felt and, I think probably correctly, that Morgenthau was nobody's fool and would have spoken up. He was not about to hide something. And I still don't quite understand how this whole business got by Morgenthau.

But as to how much we knew, we must have known plenty. I mean, hell, we had agents all over there and intelligence, and I just don't think anyone gave a damn. Refugees coming over here were kind of a pain in the neck to the people.

And the refugees that came to the United States in the early days were very Germanic. They were more Germanic than Jewish, as I recall. And so we kind of doused them with the same feeling of distaste as we would for Germans who were very Germanic, stiff and a little bit haughty.

Refugees, somehow or another, were not at all the priority then any more than the Vietnamese refugees are a priority in Hong Kong, you know. We weren't quite that bad like that, but something like that a little bit.

Do you recall having any animosity or recall any of the Jewish community in San Francisco having animosity about the fact that we didn't take more refugees? That is, I think in those days, we even had a quota system which precluded us from taking German Jewish refugees from Germany.

Or in San Francisco, I think.

During the prewar days.

I don't know about the Jewish leaders because I was too young to be doing business with them. But there was a real feeling of fear in the Jewish community in San Francisco prewar. I think assimilation was not very good. Even the most

aristocratic of the Jewish families here, I think assimilated rather badly in those days with Gentiles. I mean, they gave money to this and that, but they weren't in their clubs as they are now, for example.

Antisemitism was very popular. Hitler's adjutant from World War II was the consul general here, was a member of the Burlingame Country Club, et cetera. Either Fritz Weidemann or von Killinger, or, I forget which one of those two fellows.

And some of these refugees began to arrive, and I think it scared a lot of the San Francisco Jewry. They had an unpleasant, often had, not all of them by a long shot, but some of them had a rather unpleasant Germanic manner, so it was felt. And I think a lot of the San Francisco Jews felt it was going to cause more antisemitism, that they were more at risk. So I don't think they were particularly worrying, are we getting enough out? Now that some of them were for sure, but I wasn't aware that was in the policy positions.

When you came back, pick up the narrative of what happened to you when you came back to San Francisco, I gather. And you've been in public life. Why don't you trace that for us?

Well, when I came back, I got hit by this problem of who'd been in combat and who hadn't emotionally. And I felt drawn to those who'd shared the experience, didn't want anything to do with those who hadn't. Most of those I knew, strangely enough, had not been in combat. How they missed it, I don't know, but it caused a big problem for me.

And I found myself drawn to, although I went into business, I found myself drawn to a rather broad group of refugees associated with the universities. One was a professor of economics from UC Berkeley who was a Viennese whom I always thought was Jewish and learned when he died that he was not, a fellow named Breyer. And another who was a professor of German History named [? Zummerfeld, ?] also not Jewish, I don't think, but very liberal, wonderful types who knew absolutely what was going on.

So I began to read The Economist and the right periodicals to find out what was going on. And I found myself in a fairly interesting group of intellectuals, mostly Jewish, here in San Francisco after the war. But as America had been so distant from the war physically and my parents' generation having no idea about it, many others, no idea. I felt very alone at times and would welcome when some member of the Fourth Armored Division would come to town. And many of my Fourth Armored Division friends apparently had the same experience when they returned home.

And then I at least had a lot of opportunities. My family had some dough, and I could pretty well take my choice. In fact, I'm sure I made the wrong decision, but at any rate, I had some options open. A lot of these folks did not, and they went back into the army, became regular army officers, and stayed in until retirement because they felt they were not part of the mainstream which was noncombatant then.

I've often empathized with the Vietnam veteran because I'm sure it was a much more difficult situation. There they didn't know what they were fighting for. Still don't know what they were fighting for, and they went through some terrible misery. At least we had a constructive war.

What did you-- you said you went into business? What business was that and what did you do in public life and tell us about basically what your activities have been.

I was in the automobile business, which my father had started, still have an automobile dealership. I spent some time on public television. First, doing a show on really environmental and local political problems called Profile Bay Area, which I then left but stayed on the air for many years. Went and moderated and produced a show called World Press also for public television. Did that for about 15 or 20 years.

And I was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. I was elected state chairman at one point of the Democratic Party in California. And I had some unsuccessful campaigns for this and that. And I was the city's chief administrative officer for 10 years,

Which is a full-time job?

That's a full-time job. I left the automobile business and went to work as a city employee.

And you're in the automobile business now again?

I'm back in it now.

You said, I think earlier, that you belonged to a synagogue.

Yes.

Discuss when that happened and what motivated you.

My wife and I joined Temple Emanuel about 15 or 20 years ago. We felt a strong need for identity, a better understanding of what Jews were about, and I felt a strong need for a political anchor. I felt I was a Jew. I better damn well run the flag up, and I ought to join a temple. Whether I joined the right temple for me and my family, I've never been quite sure.

What were your options?

I could have joined another temple. My father had belonged to the one on California and Webster, Shearith Israel. And subsequently, because of my government or political roles, I've met many of the rabbis and the Orthodox and conservative groups that I like very much indeed.

So I feel very-- I wish I knew more about Judaism. I enjoy going to the temple services. I wish I'd given my children more of a chance at a Jewish education. I've gotten to know a little bit the rabbi at this place, Rabbi Lipner, I think his name is, Pinchas.

Well, the chap in this building, very interesting man. So I feel very Jewish. But I am not very good at Jewish history or something of that sort.

How many children and who are they and did you give them any Jewish rearing at all?

Well, I told them from the day they were born and continue to tell them literally every time I see them. Don't forget you're Jewish, and find out more, if you can, about your background just out of self-protection, if nothing else as well as for the fun of it. I think they're very aware of it.

None are married, but it wouldn't surprise me if they married Jews. And they didn't go to temple. They went to athletic events and this and that.

Our oldest is 30. His name is John, lives in Mill Valley, graduate of a liberal arts college. Our second son, Christopher, lives in New Mexico. He went to Stanford. He was an engineer. He's going into medicine.

My third son, Anthony, is trying to make his way in the movie business in Southern California. And we have a 20-year-old, Lucy, who's a student at Hampshire College in Massachusetts. And they are now starting to be more interested in Judaism. My Christopher and Lucy especially.

Why is that?

Beats me.

Because you didn't give it to them when they were small.

Oh, I think so. I think there's an awful lot I didn't give them.

But you make a point of mentioning it to them now.

Yes, I think we're in for a bad time in the United States.

We being?

We, those of us who are Jewish. And I think it's going to come fast. I mean, everyone is just kind of coasting along, but I think things are going-- I'm a pessimist, obviously. But I think things are not going well for us.

And the fact that we can't balance a budget is especially scary. And the economy is turning down. And I think it's going to get very wretched, and when it does, and the Jews are in the headlines, especially the financial headlines these days, I think we're just going to get hit before we know it. And I think that, especially young people, need to know how to respond if they can and how to figure out how to protect themselves.

What will happen to Jews in America?

I have no idea, but I think it's going to be some unpleasantness.

And you think Jews will be singled out?

I do.

Because perhaps of some

Well, it's just tradition.

--financial adventures?

They're being singled out. They're being singled out in Poland now. There's hardly a Jew left. They're being singled out Romania now. There's hardly a Jew left. What they've got over there is extremely difficult economic situations.

They're being singled out in Russia. There are some Jews left. The same situation prevails, a rotten economy. And the similarity between those countries and us is our economy is turning way down. You can buy it for \$0.10 on the dollar.

All you have to do is read what the Japanese are doing every day of the week. And so it's going to make the standards of living turn down, unemployment rates go up, et cetera. I don't think they're going to say to themselves, we've got a party system that doesn't work, or a nonparliamentary system that doesn't work, or Congress is not becoming effective, or not- they're not going to say anything.

They're going to say some no-good caused this. Maybe they'll pick out the Lithuanians. I doubt it.

You think they'll pick out the Jews.

I do.

Like Germany did in the '30s.

Like they've done for one heck of a long time.

Yes, yes. Whereas in Germany with a strong economy may put their Jews on a pedestal, the few they have left.

I think Germany and Europe, which is perhaps a break in all this, are going to be super strong. And we're still in 1990. In 1992, when that European Community opens up, I mean, they're going to be so powerful, they won't care about

anyone else. They won't even have to look outside of themselves is the problem. So between them and the Japanese, that's where all the money is going to be.

You think this country's institutions will be able to resist what you might see is an encroaching form of Nazism if our economy goes down?

Well, I'm not saying we're going to have a Nazism. Let's just say there were no Jews left in this country and ask the question, do I think our institutions can handle it? I would say no.

I'd say we're going to go through a major revision. They can't handle it now. We're not functioning. I mean, we don't have a budget. We can't even get one through our Congress and the executive. It's extraordinary situation.

The Japanese feel that we're in total decline. And whether we're quite that bad or not, I don't know, but we're not doing anything about our educational system, our infrastructure, our research and development, our balancing the budget. All we're doing is borrowing from abroad. And once they stop lending to us and it's about right now they're going to stop lending to us, going to get very rough here. So something is going to have to give. What, I haven't the foggiest idea.

But I gather you're saying you foresee bleak times in this country for Americans Jews.

Well, those are your words, not mine. I think that American Jews have had a wonderful time in this country right up until the present time since the end of World War II. They've had complete mobility. They could be in the government or out. They could have any position.

They could be considered for president or vice president as Diane Feinstein was four years ago. No one would bat an eyelash. And I think they've been valued as very helpful, important citizens.

Now the question is, is that sort of a situation going to continue? And I'm inclined to think it will change. Bleak means it will change very drastically. I'm not sure how drastically it's going to change.

What would be your overall assessment in looking back as you've done in the last day or two 45 years, 46 years, to what you saw when you were in the Fourth Armored Division? What effect has that had on you in subsequent years? Emotionally, do they have any effect on you? Has it changed your point of view, your perceptions, in any way?

Well, I think I've taken three or four things out of the whole business, not necessarily in order of importance. But we used to have a phrase in the war that sort of typified America in those days, "beaucoup materiel" is what the French used to say about it. And we really had it. We were so rich.

And my division was sort of the epitome of that. We literally had anything. We had the latest shell, the latest this, latest that. We didn't have the right clothes, unfortunately, but we had almost everything else. And so we were a very cocky bunch representing a very rich country then. And so one thing I took out was we used to be very rich.

Another thing I took out is the therapeutic aspects of combat. Under certain conditions, no matter how bad it is, people can feel very good about themselves and their comrades, and that's how we felt in my division. I think that was a wonderful feeling for those of us that had it.

Third is that Germany would have been an absolute monster if the British hadn't stopped them. And if they had taken England, we would have paid in blood, and the Jews would have been terribly oppressed here, if not exterminated, if they had taken England. So that Germany had to be stopped.

And I think the fourth thing at least I felt in those days was that the military is very apolitical and should be kept apolitical, and that we've been lucky in the United States to keep the military out of politics and better be sure we continue to do so.

You said something earlier, and I wonder if you still feel the same way 45 years later, you wanted to be in combat, and

some of these tough, New York Bronx kids wanted to be in combat because there was a feeling, true or otherwise, the perception lingering maybe that Jews wouldn't fight for their own rights. Did I misstate that, or is that approximately what you said?

It's approximately in that I saw many of my Jewish friends at school and elsewhere not go into combat, yes.

Do you do you think what you've learned since about what Germany did to Jews and how what you know now of how Jews behave and Israelis behave, do you still think that perception exists in the world?

No.

That Jews won't fight?

No. And I think Israel has done a great deal to eradicate that perception. And I think learning about the people in Warsaw who did fight has helped to eradicate it. And I think mine was a coincidental thing, not a true statistic. So I think my feeling was totally incorrect, and my perception was totally incorrect in those days. And I no longer hold that.

I think going back to your question of antisemitism that to a certain extent, the weather vane will be if the Congress changes toward Israel and if it does, I think it will represent what they're hearing from their constituents. And I think that will send a certain message as to how people here in this country are feeling about Jews.

Do you think Israel is handling its current problems properly?

I felt Israel got off base in the days of Mr. Begin, and I still feel her off base. But they're in an untenable situation.

Any other overall views that you have distilled from 45 years of reflection?

No. I feel very emotional.

Explain.

I don't think about the war or the things you brought up very much, and I think I didn't allow myself to think of it too much in combat because I figured that some of my colleagues got scared. Let me rephrase that. Some of them couldn't handle their fear. Some of the most surprising deserted or had to be relieved because they couldn't handle the fear.

We had an executive officer who just died, a hell of a nice man from Chicago. He was made battalion commander, and all he did was sit in the vehicle and drink brandy until relieved. They gave an MP battalion instead.

We had a survey officer named Webber who became a basket case, couldn't take the fear. Had to be relieved. We had that a lot.

I mean, there were enough instances to show me that if you thought about it too carefully, you couldn't handle it too well, so I kept it out. And I've been trying to drain up as you ask these good questions about what did these women look like and who was taking care of them and all. I just feel like crying. I can't tell you why, but--

Anything else at all?

I have one question, Roger. When you mentioned that when you took some German soldiers, the enlisted men, the young men, they didn't strike you as master race, or they didn't look big and the way you had thought of them, but that you had a different-- when you captured the generals, and they were being housed in that castle, you had some time to look at them. How did they strike you, the generals, the leaders?

The initial prisoners we took, which happened in Normandy, a couple of officers and their equivalent of GIs were not very impressive as I recall. And they'd been pounded, and they were scared, and they were meek. Later, we took some

SS prisoners, and they'd been pounded too, but they were very tough-looking, unpleasant types.

The generals were extraordinarily disciplined and arrogant, really. And when you'd come into the castle, you would be met by the senior general, the one lieutenant general of the whole bunch, and then you'd go into the room where there are all these major generals and brigadier general, and they'd stamp to attention. They were a very different kind of cloth.

You didn't feel at all comfortable with them. They were professional, military types, but very, very, very tough and, I think, smart and dramatic and more-- they fitted more the prototype that I had in mind of a customer you don't want to cross.

Had some of them or most of them been combat leaders, do you think?

They'd all been all been combat leaders or staff in the war. And they were there to be checked and screened to see if any of them should be sent to the war crimes trial.

Do you recall whether any of them were?

I have heard and I don't remember, to tell you the truth. I left, as I say. I came home.

The revelations of Nuremberg, what did that do to you? Do you recall? The Nuremberg Trials?

No. I understand the question. Strangely enough, I always had some question. In my mind, I thought, you know, we get Hitler and all, you want to execute them all. Finally, we had them, and we had Tojo in the Pacific. And as time went on and before they were executed, I wondered just what-- Are we executing them because they're villains, or are we executing them because they lost?

And they executed Julius, Julius Streicher, for example. And I remember he used to make the Jews eat grass. And I'd read that before going over there. And I could see no reason to show any mercy to a fellow like Streicher, but I did wonder about Keitel and whoever those other generals were that they had as I wondered a little bit about Tojo. I've never been quite sure in my mind to this day whether we did the right thing.

And I had the same reaction in watching the Civil War on television recently when they imprisoned Jeff Davis, the president of the Confederacy, and I think didn't treat Robert E. Lee too well, either. He had to get out of the country.

There's a tendency if you lose, you're in deep yogurt. So but I did learn-- that's where I think I heard about the Einsatzgruppen, now that you remind me, was in the Nuremberg trials. I never heard of that stuff before.

And Auschwitz and--

Yes.

The Killing Fields.

Right. That's where it came out.

This is a rather involved question, but I'd like to pose it to you anyway. If you would be willing to execute Julius Streicher, the Jew Baiter as everyone knew him, who probably never exercised any real authority in Germany as Gauleiter but you have doubts about people like high staff officers Keitel, Goering, and-- who actually set the plan of annihilation in motion, but who were army officers or high government officials, does that strike you as--

I think I felt that if we had lost, that Eisenhower and Patton and the rest would have gone to the gallows. And I've never considered them as bad men. Now the Germans were beyond the pale. There's no question about it. I don't think I gave it too much thought, but you asked me, so it crossed my mind at the time of Nuremberg, are we doing the right thing

with these guys?

I think Himmler committed suicide, too, if I recall. Well, I surely-- and Heydrich was assassinated. I surely would have given them very short shrift if I had had the authority myself. And Goering, I would have given very short shrift, too. I suppose all of them, including Ribbentrop and all the rest, I would have wouldn't have been too merciful.

And the trial did bring it out, but it was a one-way street. I mean, I think about the only one who got off was Schacht or someone like that. And yeah, one or two others. All I know is you better not lose even if you're on the so-called side of right.

Anything else at all? Any insight at all from any angle on what we've been talking about?

Well, I'm glad that this Holocaust Center is trying to find everybody that was involved because one hears continuously that it never existed. It's all ersatz. And if people keep saying that enough, you start to wonder, did it exist or didn't it?

And unless you get people who've been in the camps, that is, were inmates or photographs or both, these folks who say it's a myth, I think they're going to get louder and louder as time goes on. So I'm very glad that the Holocaust Center is going through this activity. People have short memories is a problem, I think.

And I'm not so sure how many good guys there are in public leadership throughout the world. I think a fellow like von Weizsacker, the president of Germany is definitely a good guy, but he's sort of a rarity. I looked upon Gorbachev very fondly myself, but I'm not so sure how effective he is at stamping-- of course, I think now the poor fellow's going to be-- he's finished. But I'm not sure he's been very effectual about doing anything about antisemitism or whether he and his friends have even cared about the rise of antisemitism in the Soviet Union.

So that given a dearth of really gutsy leaders and given extremely tricky conditions, when you see Mrs. Bhutto, the elected prime minister of Pakistan literally plucked out of office by the military there, for example, given the Japanese who have all the money who don't give a damn about any of this stuff, we're in for a tricky time, that's all.

Do you think Russian letting Jews emigrate simply feels that they're exporting their problem now as Germany did at one--

Yes. No, I understand the question.

--period of time?

I have simply assumed, perhaps incorrectly, that they felt it would be a policy which would be appreciated by the Americans whose friendship they are obviously seeking. Whether it's to reduce friction or lessen an internal problem or not, I have no idea. I'm very glad they're doing it. I think for the Russian Jews it's becoming increasingly untenable. And I think they all have a healthy role to play in Israel, and I hope they'll be used properly.

Do you think Jews in Russia are going through what you foretell might occur here because their system is crumbling?

Yes, I do.

Pointing at somebody?

Absolutely.

Do you have some documents or pictures or something you want to show us?

I do have a couple of things I might-- I don't know if I got it--

Well, let's have a look.

--if they're worth looking at.

Sure.

Any further questions?

Does Helga have any questions before we get to it?

I'm a survivor myself, I'm most interested to know, since part of my family was killed in Theresienstadt where you have been, if you have seen men in the other part. As I understand, women were in one part and men in the other part. You only spoke of women whom you saw.

Yes, I didn't see any men. Not that I remember.

Maybe they were all killed already.

Might well have been.

In that place where you saw them, you're unable to pinpoint the precise location, but you would gather it would be east of Ohrdruf?

Yes.

More toward the Czechoslovakian border?

Yes. We went into Czechoslovakia.

You did go into Czechoslovakia?

Yes.

You know how far you went?

We went pretty close to Prague. We went to the end of the Bohemian border, as I recall. Krkavec or something like that. I have a lot of pictures in my album of me in Czechoslovakia with horses and whatnot.

So it's possible where you saw the women could have been inside Czechoslovakia?

It could well have been. I'm pretty vague on that, I'm sorry to say. I know they were women, I know they were Jewish, and I know they were prisoners. I don't know what nationality they were or where it was, really. I thought it was Theresienstadt.

I know that some of my relatives were liberated from Theresienstadt even though they said that everybody was killed there. It's not so. But they died shortly after because they couldn't take the food and the good treatment.

Is that so?

Uh-huh.

Now, I think that's all on this.

OK.

Did Richard have any questions before?